

Page Denied

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

15 February 1985

Middle East Terrorism: The Threat and Possible US ResponsesSummary

Iranian-sponsored terrorism is the greatest threat to US personnel and facilities in the Middle East. Islamic radicals in Iran view Washington's presence and influence in The Middle East as major impediments to successful export of their revolution and regard terrorism as a legitimate and effective method of attacking the US. Iranian-sponsored terrorism will continue and possibly increase so long as the clerics in Tehran do not perceive any significant costs in launching such operations. [redacted]

Syria, Libya, and Palestinian radicals also are major Middle East sponsors of terrorism. Libya regards US involvement in the region as the primary obstacle to promoting Arab military action against Israel, but is reluctant to target the US directly because it fears US retaliation. Unlike the Iranians and Libyans, Syria and the Palestinian radicals do not focus on the US as their major target, and most of their attacks are directed against their exiled political opponents, moderate Arab states, or other Palestinian groups. Syria and Libya, like Iran, use terrorism as an instrument of state policy and provide extensive support for terrorists. [redacted]

This paper was prepared by the [redacted] Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, with contributions from analysts in NESAs, Office of Global Issues, and Office of Soviet Analysis. It has been coordinated with the National Intelligence Officers for Counterterrorism, Near East-South Asia, and the USSR. [redacted]

SECRET

Iran. Radicals in the Khomeini regime are committed to spreading their Islamic ideology, and many clerics view terrorism as a legitimate, effective tool of state policy, particularly against the US position in the Middle East. Iranian-backed attacks increased by about 30 percent in 1984, and the numbers killed in Iranian-sponsored attacks outpace fatalities in strikes by all other terrorist sponsors. Senior Iranian leaders such as Ayatollah Montazeri, Khomeini's heir-apparent, Prime Minister Musavi, and Consultative Assembly speaker Rafsanjani are implicated in Iranian terrorism. [REDACTED]

Iran generally employs radical Lebanese or Iraqi Shia groups in its terrorist operations. These groups include:

- The Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain that was responsible for an unsuccessful coup attempt in Bahrain in 1981.
- The Islamic Call (Dawa) Party, with branches in Iraq, Bahrain, and Kuwait, that has bombed the US Embassy and other targets in Kuwait and is responsible for bombings and assassinations in Iraq.
- Hizballah and Husayn Musawi's Islamic Amal that operate in Lebanon and were behind the attacks on the US Embassy and the US Marine barracks as well as the more recent kidnappings of several US citizens. [REDACTED]

Tehran also can call on individual sympathizers worldwide, including some in the US, to mount terrorist attacks. Iran provides its surrogates with money, equipment, training, and intelligence. [REDACTED]

The most prominent trademark of Iranian-sponsored terrorism is the willingness of some perpetrators to die in the attempt. Iranian-sponsored Shia terrorists have carried out several car and truck bombings in Lebanon, Iraq, and Kuwait. In nearly every instance, the driver was killed. [REDACTED]

Libya and Syria have long used terrorism as an instrument of state policy. Both have used their operatives as well as surrogates to carry out operations. Syria was seriously embarrassed in 1981 when Syrian military personnel sent to Jordan to assassinate the Prime Minister were captured and their confessions televised. [REDACTED]

The Syrians provide weapons, travel documents, and intelligence support for operations by their surrogate groups and permit missions by Iranian-sponsored radicals in Lebanon. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Shia radicals associated with the Iranians, and the Armenian terrorist organization ASALA, have received Syrian assistance or training at camps in Syria and Lebanon. [REDACTED]

Tripoli provides funds and training to radicals worldwide, but generally avoids using Libyans to carry out operations against targets other than Libyan dissidents and selected pro-US heads of state. Qadhafi hires assassins and thugs when Libyan access to its targets is limited or when he wants to conceal Libyan involvement. [REDACTED]

The Palestinian Abu Nidal group--which is not a member of the PLO--remains the primary Palestinian organization responsible for terrorism. The

group once was supported by Iraq, which appears to have abandoned international terrorism over a year ago. Abu Nidal now depends on Syria and may undertake operations at Syrian direction. Several other radical Palestinian groups aligned with Syria also are involved in terrorist operations in Lebanon, Israel, and the West Bank.

25X1

25X1

The eight groups within the PLO have abided by that organization's ban on international terrorism outside Israel and the West Bank since 1974. Yasir Arafat's mainstream Fatah organization is the principal enforcer of the ban and supports diplomatic means to solve the Palestinian problem. Some PLO groups, however, are providing assistance to Lebanese Shia terrorists, and Arafat is under pressure to respond to Syrian-sponsored Palestinian strikes against Fatah officials. The most striking feature of recent Palestinian terrorism has been the attacks of pro-and anti-Arafat groups on each other.

25X1

Hitting US Targets

We do not believe the Syrians or the Palestinians would deliberately attack US targets unless US actions in Lebanon or on the Arab-Israeli issue were perceived as posing a direct, immediate threat to them. The Syrians, however, have not moved forcefully to prevent Iranian-sponsored terrorism against US targets in Lebanon. Syria condons Iranian transits through Damascus Airport and use of Syrian-controlled territory in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley for terrorist-training activities.

25X1

During the past 18 months, Libya has tried to sponsor two terrorist operations against US personnel or facilities in Latin America and Africa. Libya also has publicly praised the killing of US personnel by pro-Iranian terrorists in Lebanon.

25X1

25X1

Qadhafi threatened last June that he would "export terrorism" to the US to retaliate for the "US-inspired" attack on his headquarters by dissidents last May. Libyan capabilities will be constrained by Tripoli's generally inept foreign intelligence network, its lack of an official presence in target countries, and fear of US retaliation.

25X1

25X1

Iran has amply demonstrated its willingness to hit US personnel and facilities. It is the most likely state to try to strike additional high-profile US targets in the Middle East to demonstrate the inability of the US to protect its interests, and to portray such attacks as actions by local "Islamic patriots." Potential Iranian or Libyan targets include:

- US Embassies and associated facilities, notably in the Persian Gulf states and in Beirut, Baghdad, Cairo, Khartoum, Athens, and possibly Tunis. The Iranians and their radical Shia allies in particular might want to strike the Embassy in Beirut, to demonstrate US impotence, or Baghdad, to harm US-Iraqi relations.

- US military facilities in the Persian Gulf area. Examples include facilities in Bahrain or Oman supporting US warships and the US Military Training Mission in Saudi Arabia.
- Qadhafi might target US military facilities in Europe, such as the NATO cruise missile base at Comiso in Sicily or the Hellinikon airbase in Greece, to exploit local opposition to the US military presence.
- Iran and possibly Libya are likely to try to strike inside the US if they have been, or believe themselves about to be, attacked directly by the US.

25X1

25X1

Page Denied

Next 1 Page(s) In Document Denied

Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the smaller Gulf states probably would criticize strongly any US retaliatory strike against Syria or Palestinian elements but might only mildly criticize strikes against Libya and Iran.

A general reluctance to support any US military action against an Arab or Muslim target, however, would inhibit a public endorsement of the US move.

Soviet Reaction. The Soviets would attempt to capitalize on the propaganda windfall provided by US retaliation. They would probably issue a vague warning against further attacks, seek to claim credit when US strikes ended, and use the attacks to undermine Arab willingness to grant US forces transit or base rights or to deal with the US on the Arab-Israeli dispute. [REDACTED]

In Libya, the USSR would try to exploit heightened concern about a US threat. The Soviets probably would offer increased intelligence support and greater aid for Libyan air and coastal defenses while implying that such efforts require greater Soviet access to Libyan military facilities. Moscow might be more willing to sell Qadhafi advanced air defense equipment and fighter aircraft. [REDACTED]

Moscow would hope a US strike would spur the PLO to reconcile its differences and hinder Arafat's pursuit of a joint peace effort with Jordan. The USSR might step up shipments of advanced weaponry to Syria in an effort to signal the Arab world and the US that Moscow solidly backs its primary Arab ally. The Soviets, however, are likely to continue avoiding a specific commitment to intervene militarily if Syria is threatened. [REDACTED]

Page Denied

Next 5 Page(s) In Document Denied